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E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [OTRA](#)

SUBJECT: COUNTRY CLEARANCE FOR LARRY WESTFALL AND GENARO MARTINEZ

REF: DEPT OF TREASURY 091648Z MAR 06

¶1. Embassy San Jose is pleased to grant country clearance to Larry Westfall and Genaro Martinez, Treasury Advisors who will be in Costa Rica on TDY assignment from March 26 to April 8. The purpose of this visit is to work with officials from the Ministry of Finance on the Tax Administration Project.

¶2. Post understands assistance is not necessary. Maria Villanueva, Economic Assistant, is the assigned Control Officer and she can be reached at Embassy number (506)519-2419. The Embassy after-hours emergency phone number is (506)220-3127.

¶3. Upon arrival in country all TDY visitors are to make contact with their Embassy Control Officer for information regarding a security briefing.

¶4. Accommodations: Post understands hotel reservations will be arranged by the traveler. Please be advised that hotels in San Jose require a minimum notice of 72 hours if canceling or changing reservations. Travelers must notify the hotel or Embassy 72 hours in advance if schedule changes. Hotels will assess a one-day charge if they do not receive advance notice of cancellation or changes. Prior to arrival travelers are to provide the RSO office the required information for TDY registration/emergency contact, which is hotel and/or point of contact information.

¶5. Transportation: The only taxis available at the airport are the Taxi Aeropuerto orange taxis found outside the arrival hall. Tickets for the orange taxis are sold at a ticket booth located immediately outside the arrival hall exit doors. Fares (payable in U.S. dollars or local currency) vary according to destination but the cost of a standard orange taxi ticket to the Embassy is \$12, to the Intercontinental Hotel is \$14 and to downtown San Jose is \$12. Vans are also available at increased cost. If you miss the ticket counter or otherwise need assistance with orange taxi service, the company has an individual posted curbside from where the orange taxis are dispatched. Taxi Aeropuerto also offers pick-up service and transportation to the airport for departing passengers. Reservations can be made 24 hours a day by phoning (506)221-6865.

Elsewhere in San Jose, licensed taxis are considered safe when using standard security precautions. Licensed taxis have a yellow triangle on the door, an identification number, a taxi light on the roof of the car, and generally have working meters. Ask if the meter is functioning before entering the cab. If the meter is not functioning, the cost of the fares should be negotiated prior to entering the cab. Licensed taxis are also easily obtainable from hotels.

Unlicensed cabs come in all shapes and sizes and should be avoided.

¶6. Public Affairs: Please note that the Public Affairs Office is the Embassy's designated point of contact with the press. If visitors have been scheduled for press events by local partner organizations or others, please inform the Embassy's Public Affairs Office. Should visitors be approached by the press with questions or a request for an interview, they should refer the press to the Embassy Public Affairs Office. In short, post requests that visitors not speak with the press before consulting with the Public Affairs office and they can be reached at 506/519-2287.

¶7. Threat assessment/local conditions: All official visitors must travel with passports, preferably official or diplomatic. Without these documents, travelers lack official status in the eyes of the Costa Rican Government. During this time of heightened security alerts, all travelers should consult the department's website for the latest public announcement travel warnings at www.usembassy.or.cr or www.usembassy.or.cr/osac.html.

Costa Rica is currently rated as a "high" crime threat post. The increasing use of violence during the commission of a street crime is a threat to all visitors. Travelers are urged to exercise caution, as in any large city. Local law enforcement agencies are not up to U.S. standards and have limited capabilities. Jewelry should not be worn on the streets. Large amounts of cash should not be displayed. The downtown area of San Jose should be avoided at night because of the increase of criminal activity that occurs in this area.

Credit card fraud and credit card "number skimming" is a rapidly growing crime. Visitors should not use debit cards and should check their credit card accounts frequently.

Visitors are advised to avoid unofficial moneychangers who may offer better rates but who often trade in counterfeit currency. The present rate of exchange is approximately 499 Costa Rican colones to one dollar. Accommodation exchange is available at a comparable rate at the airport.

Visitors should exercise caution if they will be driving in Costa Rica. The combination of poor road conditions, erratic driving, and pedestrian and animal traffic on the roads make driving very treacherous. Costa Rica has one of the highest accident rates per automobile in the world. The Embassy strongly recommends against driving outside of the San Jose area at night. Vehicles should not be left unattended or packages left visible inside them.

Costa Rica is an earthquake zone and periodically experiences significant tremors.

Visitors should be careful not to eat peanuts or products made from peanuts grown in Costa Rica because they may harbor aflatoxin, which is suspected in the causation of liver cancer.

¶8. Laptops: Please be advised that State Department regulations prohibit installation or use of privately-owned computers in any State Department building. Visitors must notify the Regional Security Office in advance if they intend to use U.S. Government-owned portable computers in the Chancery.

¶9. Mandatory Personal Security Training: Effective January 1, 2005, all American personnel traveling to post for 30 days or more at an overseas location under COM authority must complete appropriate overseas personal security training prior to travel. It is the responsibility of the sponsoring office to verify that this training has been completed as outlined in State cable 66580, dated 25 March 2004.

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